

Text, Shape, and Communion: What Unites Us When Nothing's the Same Anymore?

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When the specifically Anglican liturgical tradition developed in the mid-sixteenth century there was but one order for the Holy Communion. No choices of words or alternative shapes were provided for the liturgy, and it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that such changes were even desired, at least in England—this had not been the case in Scotland or the United States. Over the past 150 years the desire for change has steadily increased: first with the words, then concerning the actions, and leading to a series of national prayer books, most deriving from the Book of Common Prayer. Amid all this liturgical diversity a fundamental question has come to the fore: Does our liturgy (especially Holy Communion) still bind us together as Anglicans?⁹ Many Anglicans have found that the binding unity of our liturgy is not so much the prayer texts anymore, but simply the basic shape and actions, though other factors are also at play, such as reading common scripture passages and using some of the same prayers. With the development of computer technology even wider variations have become possible, and authorization of particular texts has become a desire rather than reality. Given this situation, the education of worship leaders is more important than ever.

The principles of the Anglican liturgical tradition were set forth in the Preface and the section Concerning the Services of the Church in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, with the first principle being that the people together are the focus of the liturgy—hence the title “common” prayer—which means that our “worship is essentially

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corporate and envisages a wider social intentionality and bearing.”¹ To this end, therefore, the liturgy should be in a language “understood of the people,” the Bible should be read in an ordered fashion, the Service should be read in an audible manner, and there is to be one order for the realm (that is, England).

Over the past 350 years, the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* has been at the core of the liturgical life of most Anglicans. In some provinces it is the very center of the constitution of that province as well, and is thus (still) at its legal basis. Anglicans likewise find their theological understanding through their worship, and since for most of the 350 years there has been little or no change in that liturgical life, Anglican theology has also been slow to change.

While this is true for provinces which derive from the British Empire/Commonwealth, there is another slightly different stream, deriving from Scotland and the USA. This stream came into its own in the mid-1670s when the Scottish church was influenced by the non-jurors, and they in turn influenced the American church after the War of Independence.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century those influenced by the Oxford Movement began to look for change. They found the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* a straightjacket, both theologically and liturgically. In England the impetus for this change led to the revision of the *BCP* proposed in 1927, with its provision for additional texts for the consecration prayer at Communion and additional ceremony where desired. (We are limiting these comments to the eucharist.) Despite being approved by the convocations of the Church of England, however, the text was defeated in Parliament in 1928. The church itself (and its bishops) turned a blind eye, though, and allowed the use of the textual changes in the proposed 1928 Prayer Book. Here began a movement toward varied texts with the introduction of an alternative “consecration prayer.”

From the 1950s onwards various provinces began the journey to revising the entire Prayer Book. At first these revisions were very conservative, but gradually they grew in number and in breadth. In 1966, for example, the Australian Liturgical Commission issued for use the volume *Prayer Book Revision in Australia*, which contained

¹ Christopher Irvine, “Introduction,” in *Anglican Liturgical Identity*, ed. Christopher Irvine, Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Studies 65 (Norwich, UK: SCM-Canterbury Press, 2008), 8–11.

a number of revised rites. Of these rites, there were two versions of the eucharist: a conservative version of the *BCP* rite using traditional language, and a “radical” version not only in modern English (“you” rather than “Thou”) but also with an adapted shape of the eucharistic prayer based on that of the Church of South India, along with the introduction of a Greeting of Peace prior to the preparation of the gifts on the Table. As far as this writer is aware, this is the first officially issued liturgy in modern English. This “radical” order developed in due course into the Second Order of Holy Communion in the 1977/8 *Australian Prayer Book*.

In the later 1960s and early 1970s through the 1980s, other provinces began the process of liturgical revision, including entire prayer books, not just individual services. Hence there were new authorized prayer books in Australia in 1977/78, the United States in 1979, England in 1980, and Canada in 1985, with New Zealand and South Africa following soon after in 1989.

Another important influence at this time was the translation of the Roman Missal into modern English in 1969, as a result of the Second Vatican Council. As other churches were revising their prayer books and liturgies at this time, ecumenical considerations and negotiations led to the preparation of common ecumenical liturgical texts by the International Consultation on English Texts, published as *Prayers We Have in Common*. These included the texts of the Ordinary, together with the Creeds and the Lord’s Prayer. Most of the liturgical texts published in that volume found their way into the revised Anglican prayer books mentioned above.

The publication of common texts also opened the way for multiple options for the eucharist prayer within the one order (the Missal has four). This practice has been reflected in almost all Anglican revisions since then. The *Australian Prayer Book* has in its Second (and most widely used) Order four forms of the Great Thanksgiving. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* (USA) has also four forms (including one based on the so-called Hippolytus prayer, and one modeled closely on the Prayer of St. Basil), together with additional texts that can be used at weddings, funerals, communion with the sick, and so on. It is this diversity which became common practice in the revision process, and has led to the uneasy question of what constitutes Anglican commonality.

Later, from the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, a wider range of provinces began to publish, authorize, and use revised orders

of the eucharist. These included a number of African and Asian provinces: Japan in 1990, the Philippines in 1991, Tanzania in 1995, Nigeria in 1996, Hong Kong in 2000, Kenya in 2002, and Korea in 2004.

In 1985 there was a gathering of Anglican liturgical scholars, connected with the international, ecumenical *Societas Liturgica*. These original twelve had come together in Boston, Massachusetts to discuss the formation of a group of Anglican scholars to meet regularly and discuss liturgical matters of concern to Anglican provinces. At the Boston meeting they discussed the matter of admission of children to Holy Communion before confirmation. A statement of recommendations was agreed upon and released. Unforeseen to those present, this statement became quite influential around the Anglican Communion. It led in due course to a much wider group of scholars meeting as the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) and preparing a statement on baptism which became known as the Toronto Statement, "Walk in Newness of Life," issued in 1991.

The next topic to be considered was liturgical inculturation at their meeting in York, followed by the eucharist. Partly because of lack of funding, it was agreed that statements would not be agreed upon and issued unless as wide a range of provinces as possible could be represented. So the holding of preparatory conferences was suggested as way forward. Each preparatory conference would be followed by a full meeting two years later, when funding had been raised to bring this wider representation together.

The first of these took place at Untermarchtal in Germany in 1993. Papers were presented to prepare for the full meeting two years later. Of remarkable noteworthiness was a paper presented by the Reverend Professor Thomas Tally of The General Seminary in New York. Entitled "Eucharistic Prayers: Past, Present, and Future," Professor Tally based his argument on the Greek *anaphoras*, seeking to remove all consecratory weight from the Institution Narrative and to give that weight, at least in part, to the *epiclesis*. According to him, the *place* of the *epiclesis* in the eucharistic prayer established much: it was the place where thanksgiving turned to supplication (in his terms).² His thesis was well received by those present and had some immediate results in the provinces that were in the process of liturgical revision (in some places revising again, as in Australia).

² See David R. Holeton, ed., *Revising the Eucharist: Groundwork for the Anglican Communion*, Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Studies 27 (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1994).

In 1995 a full meeting of the IALC was held in Dublin which resulted in the agreement and issuing of the Dublin Statement on the Holy Eucharist, along with “Principles and Recommendations” concerning the liturgy. This was quite a remarkable achievement as the Recommendations had led to complete agreement of those present. The Recommendations are not highly controversial, but perhaps the most important one is:

2. In the future, Anglican unity will find its liturgical expression not so much in uniform texts as in a common approach to eucharistic celebration and a structure which will ensure a balance of word, prayer, and sacrament, and which bears witness to the catholic calling of the Anglican Communion.³

This particular Recommendation was fleshed out in Section III of the document on “The Structure of the Eucharist”:

We recommend recognition of the following basic structure for the Sunday assembly:

1. *Gathering of God's People.* The people of God gather as an assembly to draw near to God and to celebrate new life in Jesus Christ.
2. *Proclaiming and Receiving the Word of God.* The Scriptures are read and the Word of God is celebrated in song and silence, reflection, preaching and response.
3. *Prayers of the People.* The people of God, as a royal priesthood, intercede for the world, the church, the local community, and all in need.
4. *Celebrating at the Lord's Table.* The assembly offers praise and thanksgiving over the bread and wine, and partakes in the body and blood of Christ.
5. *Going out as God's People.* The assembly disperses for a life of faith and service in the world.⁴

³ The full text of the “Principles and Recommendations” is published in a number of places: David R. Holetton, ed., *Renewing the Anglican Eucharist: Findings of the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Dublin, Eire, 1995*, Grove Worship Series 135 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996); David R. Holetton, ed., *Our Thanks and Praise: The Eucharist in Anglicanism Today* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998); as an appendix to the Report ACC-10 in 1997; and in the recent Colin Buchanan, ed., *Anglican Eucharistic Liturgies, 1985–2010* (London: Canterbury Press, 2011).

⁴ Buchanan, *Anglican Eucharistic Liturgies*, 10.

As Colin Buchanan points out, this basic structure has been universally adopted in revisions,⁵ even in the more “radical” revisions of the Diocese of Sydney. Over the past few years there has been some concern in the Diocese of Sydney that all forms of liturgical worship were being lost. As a result, a committee was set up to prepare and issue some services, including the Lord’s Supper, for use. These were published in *Common Prayer: Resources for Gospel-Shaped Gatherings*, and were authorized by the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney in October 2012.⁶ They have no authorization beyond the Diocese of Sydney in the wider Australian church; however, the point is that these services, too, follow the fivefold pattern outlined above.

While there is almost unanimous agreement around the Anglican Communion about the basic fivefold shape of the Holy Eucharist, this is not the case when it comes to the shape and contents of the eucharistic prayer (the Great Thanksgiving). There seem to be two basic models.

The first of these is based on the eucharistic prayer of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, which gave considerable weight to the consecratory role of the Institution Narrative. The notion of consecration is not abundantly clear. What does “consecration” mean? Does it have a formula? The Lambeth-Chicago Quadrilateral (1886/88) required the inclusion of the Institution Narrative within an Anglican Great Thanksgiving. What is not made clear is the purpose of this insistence. Is it to make sure that something happens? If so, what? And if the Institution Narrative is essential, what do we make of the *anaphora* of Saints Addai and Mari,⁷ which does not contain an Institution Narrative yet is recognized as a “proper” eucharistic prayer? The shape of eucharistic prayers in the *BCP* model centers very much on the Institution Narrative, often by being prepared for by an *epiclesis* enjoining the change of the elements (presumably by the Narrative).

The other model, which is more Trinitarian, is based on Eastern prayers, and is followed by the Scottish and North American traditions, takes the weight off the Institution Narrative and looks to the concept of “consecration by thanksgiving.” This is the model strongly recommended by Talley. It derived through the Scottish rite of 1637 and returns to the shape of the 1549 rite containing an *anamnesis*,

⁵ Buchanan, *Anglican Eucharistic Liturgies*, 16.

⁶ Archbishop of Sydney’s Liturgical Panel, *Common Prayer: Resources for Gospel-Shaped Gatherings* (Sydney: Anglican Press Australia, 2012).

⁷ See R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, third edition (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 40.

oblation, and supplication following the Institution Narrative. An *epiclesis* was reintroduced (by the non-jurors) and the shape and content of this order became that of the prayer book of the newly independent Episcopal Church in the USA (1789). This form of the eucharistic prayer has been quite widely accepted, and continues to be used in the prayer books of the USA, Canada, Scotland, Southern Africa, and the West Indies, as well as in the English *Common Worship* (2000) and other rites around the Communion. While the shape has received acceptance, some of the content is still a matter of debate, especially regarding the role of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) in any expression of “consecration” of the elements.

A variety of themes emerged within the new eucharistic prayers that appeared at the turn of the millennium. These themes were often based on the seasons of the year (Lent, Easter, and so on) and confined to what were called in the *BCP* tradition “Prefaces” (a changing introduction to the *Sanctus*), or were whole new prayers based on some aspect of salvation history. In the twenty-first century the theme of the environment has become popular, and eucharistic prayers have been prepared (and often authorized) with this in mind. While one might argue that creation and the environment are perfectly proper biblical themes, other themes that are less biblically centered have also emerged, focusing on peace and social justice, for example. There is the risk here of the eucharistic prayer becoming more centered on theological ideas or socio-political causes than on the mystery of God in Christ.

One of the “common” aspects of the *BCP* that is not much recognized in discussions of commonality and Anglican unity is the matter of the ordered reading of the scriptures, which is one of the IALC’s principles of Anglican liturgy and is noted by the Preface of the 1549 Prayer Book and all since then. Each *BCP* has had a lectionary for Sunday use at the Holy Eucharist. It contains two readings per Sunday—an epistle reading and a gospel reading—which are unchanging from year to year (that is, a one-year cycle). This commonality in readings was lost for a time during the 1970s until the turn of the century, as various lectionary patterns and contents were recognized and used by different Anglican churches. The Roman Catholic lectionary, for example, provided three readings for every Sunday and festival day, but was not entirely satisfactory to some Anglicans because of the choices of many of the Old Testament passages.

In the early 1980s a revision of the Roman lectionary cycle emanated from North America, called the *Common Lectionary*. These

tables were again revised in the 1990s as the *Revised Common Lectionary* (RCL). Some Anglican provinces began to adopt this revised lectionary as their main formal Sunday lectionary: Canada, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Southern Africa all included it in their revised books. Others were slower to make the change, but by the turn of the millennium England, the United States, Ireland, and the West Indies had also adopted it.

Other African and Asian provinces, including Japan, Papua New Guinea, and Melanesia, have adopted versions of the *Common Lectionary* or its parent lectionary, the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, but not many have adopted the RCL. Some are simply using versions of revised lectionary tables, often adapted from the English *Alternative Service Book* (1980), perhaps as the result of financial difficulties such as the cost of publication. If Anglican tradition has long held that agreed-upon lectionary tables are an important way of being united in worship, then the widespread adoption of the *Revised Common Lectionary* could be a method of being united in the Ministry of the Word. The current political difficulties can only be helped by us all reading the same texts on the same day, especially when we note that the RCL is also widely used ecumenically, as well as in languages other than English. It has had a remarkable influence in bringing together Christians of “many tribes and nations.”

As noted briefly above, during the 1970s a series of liturgical texts was prepared by the English-speaking ecumenical group International Consultation on English Texts (ICET). These consisted of the Ordinary of the Mass, the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, and some canticles from the daily office, and was published as *Prayers We Have in Common*. During the late 1970s the ICET eucharistic texts were adopted into the revisions of the Holy Eucharist in those provinces which were revising their rites at that time. Within all these texts, only two areas remained in dispute: line 9 of the Lord's Prayer (“Lead us not into temptation/Save us from the time of trial”) and line 16 of the Nicene Creed (“and was made man”). Apart from some variations around these two lines, the texts were adopted widely and became popular among those who wished to have a modern language liturgy.

In the 1980s ICET was replaced with the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), made up of the ecumenical bodies of the English-language churches from Great Britain, North America, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Southern Africa. A revised set of texts was prepared and published as *Praying Together* (1988). These texts were a revision of the earlier set, taking note of some scholarly

criticism and the growing influence of inclusive language. Again, there was widespread acceptance of these texts, along with questioning of line 9 of the Lord's Prayer (now "Save us from the time of trial") and line 16 of the Nicene Creed (now rendered "and became truly human"). The revised texts were adopted into many of the authorized liturgies of the time and some provinces, like Australia, took the great risk of changing even the Lord's Prayer to the ELLC text. Praxis history has shown that this was a successful change in Australia, but in other parts of the Communion, adopting the ELLC texts has not been so successful. The Church of England decided to remain with the ICET text for the Lord's Prayer, and *Common Worship* offers the ELLC version as an appendix only. This unfortunately means that the prayer at the very center of Christian liturgy is not a prayer that brings unity to English-speaking Anglicans around the world. The fact that these texts belong to the people makes them less open to any change—something the Roman Catholic Church is experiencing at this time of change in the recent English translation of the Roman Missal.

A number of the liturgical texts of the Holy Eucharist likewise belong to the people, and these "common Anglican texts" still unite Anglicans in ways that the *Book of Common Prayer* has done in the past. In some modern prayer books these prayers have been adapted directly from the *BCP* texts; all are in modern English.

One such common Anglican prayer is the Collect for Purity. It is almost unanimously included in modern prayer books, but on the whole is no longer mandatory to be used. Two variations of this prayer are:

Heavenly Father, all hearts are open to you, no secrets are hidden from you. Purify us with the fire of your Holy Spirit, that we may love and worship you faithfully, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Wales, *Order for the Holy Eucharist*, 2004)

Almighty God, you bring to light things hidden in darkness, and know the shadows of our hearts; Cleanse and renew us by your Spirit, that we may walk in the light and glorify your name, through Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. (Kenya, *Our Modern Services*, 2002)

Similarly, the Prayer of Humble Access is also widely included but, again, no longer mandatory. As the noted Australian liturgist Evan Burge once commented, "It is a beautiful prayer—with nowhere to go!" It should be noted, however, that the Episcopal Church

has returned it to its 1549 position just prior to receiving communion, and this might be a happy solution for others to adopt as well. Two modern variations of the Prayer of Humble Access include:

We do not trust in our own goodness, Lord, when we come to your table, but in your many and great mercies. We are not good enough even to pick up the crumbs under your table. But because you always have mercy, help us, Lord, to eat the Flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his Blood, that we may always live in him and he in us. (Papua New Guinea, *Anglican Prayer Book*, 1991)

Most merciful Lord, your love compels us to come in. Our hands were unclean, our hearts were unprepared; we were not fit even to eat the crumbs from under your table. But you, Lord, are the God of our salvation, and share your bread with sinners. So cleanse and feed us with the precious body and blood of your Son, that he may live in us and we with him; and that we, with the whole company of Christ, may sit and eat in your kingdom. (*A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 1989, and *Common Worship*, 2000)

There are also other prayers of wide usage across the Anglican Communion, such as the postcommunion prayers of the English liturgist David Frost: “Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home,” and various forms of the *BCP* Blessing: “The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God . . .” (*Alternative Service Book*, 1980).

All these texts belong to the printed prayer book tradition in Anglican liturgy. In the past twenty or so years a new tradition has emerged, as radical as the invention of printing was in the late Middle Ages: the world of the computer and the Internet. This cyber-technology has enabled a whole new way of doing liturgy. The text is no longer limited to the pages of an authorized book. What is emerging (and it is still only emerging) is the breadth of availability of all sorts and conditions of liturgical texts, almost at all times and in every place (where the technology is available and affordable). This development has raised a number of issues for Anglicans: theological, practical, and ecclesial.

Anyone with the technology can access limitless amounts of material: whole orders of service, individual prayers, lectionary texts,

and so on. These resources can be downloaded and used (and edited) in any way desirable. Copyright is basically a thing of the past. This openness to widespread adaptation has both advantages and disadvantages, and raises very real tensions between the universal and the local.

The widely diverse cultural contexts in which Anglicans worship have long been recognized around the Communion. Languages and geographical and societal cultures differ from province to province (and even within provinces, and within dioceses). Part of the drive toward variation is the desire to adapt to local circumstances, rather than worshipping in a language and societal and ecclesiastical structure of long ago and far away. The availability of such resources is unlimited.

For Anglicans, “decently and in order” has long been a principle of our worship tradition. The opening of textual resources raises questions about their quality and indeed their theological orthodoxy. There are those who fear this new freedom, those who wish to suppress it, but also those who rejoice in it.⁸ One of the things that this has enabled is the shifting of the source of authority in matters liturgical. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the authority was the church as expressed through its *Book of Common Prayer*. The bishop was the arbiter in matters of dispute. By the twentieth century the authority was still the (local) prayer book, but the local book was determined on the whole by a standing liturgical commission and authorized by a General Synod (or its equivalent). Bishops played their role mainly through synodical structures.

With the new technology of the twenty-first century this authority structure is no long enforceable (if it ever was). The authority person is the one who controls the computer, no longer the national church or its synod. This may be the local clergy, or the local worship committee. The danger of this shift is that local considerations may well overrule diocesan, provincial, or even “universal” considerations. While local authorities are less likely to influence church structure (which is accepted by most if not all), they are free to introduce theological views (prejudices?) or political considerations within the texts. This is one of the risks of the current situation, as we see the pushing

⁸ See articles in the section “The Future of the Book of Common Prayer” by Donald Kraus, Clayton L. Morris, and Pierre W. Whalon in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 541–557.

of sectional interests to the exclusion of others. These interests can be linguistic (“inclusive language” or “postmodernism”) or theological (in a movement toward a more “catholic” position or the embrace of “reformation teaching”).

So what is the way of the future? Clearly the variability brought about by the new technology is at least the current direction of the future. There is no going back, even if this were preferable. Perhaps some agreed-upon guidelines would be desirable, but who can prepare and promote them? An Anglican Communion Liturgical Commission has been suggested by Lambeth bishops and Pierre Whalon,⁹ among others, but it is difficult to see how this effort could succeed. On this matter the IALC has no taste for a “Liturgical Police Force”! The developing of such provisions would of necessity involve the need for an extremely wide consultation, and then the computer can take over anyway.

One of the ways of the future certainly involves liturgical education. Clergy-in-training and laypersons involved with liturgy preparation need to have good training in liturgical principles, with knowledge of our history, church structure, architecture, and theology, as well as other aspects of our Anglican (and ecumenical) tradition. Then, and perhaps only then, could we have confidence in the survival of an Anglican liturgical tradition—a tradition that values our common prayer, albeit adapted in many and varying ways.

⁹ Pierre W. Whalon, “The Future of Common Prayer,” in *Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, 551.